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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to improve communication among parents, teachers, and sixth-grade students who were housed in an elementary building due to school crowding. A telephone answering machine allowed students and parents to access information about homework, classwork, and upcoming events during evening hours. Additional parent outreach efforts were made by the teacher, including introductory telephone calls to parents, drop-in conference time, and solicitation of parent classroom volunteers. A system of recorded telephone messages for parents and students was developed. Parents and teachers were surveyed regarding existing parent-teacher communication and forms were prepared to enhance such communication. Students (N=26) and parents (N=26) were surveyed to analyze the effectiveness of these interventions. Analysis of the data showed that both parents and students found the telephone communication system to be helpful. Students utilized this system more frequently than did parents. According to teachers, students showed an increased frequency of homework completion as a result of this intervention. Of 26 parents, 25 indicated that they were satisfied with the amount of parent-teacher communication. However, 16 parents did not indicate that they had spent over 20 minutes talking with the teacher, despite the fact that each parent was contacted early in the year by telephone and invited to at least two evening conferences. Appended are copies of surveys of parents and students for the weeks of June 11, 1990 and May 20, 1991; an announcement of the initiation of the parent/pupil assistance line; the parent telephone directory; and a letter of solicitation of parent volunteers. (ABL)

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Improving Communications Between Parents and Teachers of Middle School Age Students by the Use of the Telephone and Other Techniques

by

William E. Cottle

Cluster 31

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A Practicum II Report presented to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1991

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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June 12, 1991

This practicum report was submitted by William E. Cottle under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

July 24, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

June S. Delano
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ABSTRACT

Improving Communications Between Parents and Teachers of Middle School Age Students by the Use of the Telephone and Other Techniques. Cottle, William E., 1991: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed. D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Elementary Secondary Education/Middle Schools/Parent Participation/ Communication/Telephone Communications Systems

This practicum was designed to improve communication among parents, teachers, and students. A telephone answering machine allowed students and parents to access information about homework, classwork, and upcoming events during evening hours. Additional parent outreach efforts were made by the teacher, including introductory telephone calls to parents, drop-in conference time, and solicitation of parent classroom volunteers.

The writer developed a system of recorded telephone messages for parents and students; surveyed parents and teachers regarding existing parent-teacher communication; prepared forms to enhance parent-teacher communication; and surveyed students and parents to analyze the effectiveness of these interventions.

Analysis of data showed that both parents and students found the telphone communication system to be helpful. Students utilized this system more often than parents. Students showed an increased frequency of homework completion as a result of this practicum, according to the teacher. Of 26 parents, 25 indicated that they were satisfied with the amount of parent-teacher communication.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

This practicum took place in a Northeastern U.S. suburb with a population of 29,349 people of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Less than 20% of the registered voters have children in the school system; another 20% of the population is over 60 years of age. The demographics of the community are changing at an increasing rate. Black, Asian, and Hispanic minorities represent 22% of the school population as of October, 1989 (Huttunen, 1990).

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The work setting was an elementary school of approximately 400 students in grades 1 through 6. The school reflected the changing demographics of the community. Census figures for the school as of October 1, 1989, reveal that black students comprised 9% of the student population. Asian students made up 9% of the population. Hispanic students constituted 2% of the student body. The 80% white student population in 1989, although slightly higher than the system average, was consistent with system-wide totals showing

a 4% decrease in the white student population from the 82% figure for 1988. Informal data presented by the assistant superintendent suggested that over three-quarters of the students have both parents or their custodial parent working full time outside the home (Huttunen, 1990).

The current public school population of 3,747 is nearly half of the peak population reached in 1974. This reduction in enrollment and increase in budgetary pressures caused major shifts in the school system. Ten elementary schools were reduced to five. Two middle schools, which housed students in grades 6 through 8, were merged into one middle school four years ago. Overcrowding at this school, as the impact of the baby boomlet began to be felt, forced the gradual return of sixth grade classes to the elementary schools, which had previously housed students through the fifth grade. By November, 1989, the last of the sixth grade middle school students had been reassigned to the elementary schools. This decision to reassign sixth grade students was brought about by limitations of space to house these students in the more developmentally appropriate middle school setting.

Many of the teachers in the school system are survivors of reductions in force and have been involuntarily transferred to this school from other

schools as these schools closed. Staff reductions are still being made at the high school level, where the student population is still declining, while increasing elementary enrollments have required the hiring of additional staff. Some specialists and teachers have been transferred from the secondary level to the elementary level.

As a result of these factors, the professional staff of the elementary school which was the setting for this practicum is an older staff, with an average age approaching 50 years and with an average of over 20 years of experience in the school system. Most were hired during the 1960s, when the school population swelled with the baby boom. Less than 15% of the teachers in the building reside in the community.

The principal is a long-time veteran of the school system and has administered this building for many years following the retirement of the previous principal. The teaching assistant principal is beginning his fourth year in this capacity following the closing of a six-room school which he had headed as a teaching principal. Both have the support of the staff and appear to work well together.

The writer is a product of the school system described here and holds an A.B. Degree in History and Political Science, has master's and post-master's

training in counseling and psychology, and is currently a doctoral student in education at Nova University. The writer began work in this community 19 years ago as a guidance counselor after teaching science in a junior high school in another community. Subsequently the writer worked in a variety of positions in the school system, including high school counselor, science teacher, and elementary counselor. The writer developed and administered a grant-funded parent outreach program conducted by elementary school counselors from 1986 to 1988 in addition to performing his full-time counseling responsibilities at the elementary level. Staff reductions at the high school caused the writer to be replaced in that counseling position by a more senior counselor who was laid off from the high school staff in 1989. The writer returned to the classroom as a social studies teacher for the school year 1989-1990.

In September, 1990, the writer was appointed as a school adjustment counselor with responsibilities involving group work with special needs students placed in substantially separate programs in two elementary schools and with "at risk" fifth and sixth graders in two other elementary schools. In the practicum setting, the writer works with two primary classes of learning disabled students and one mixed group of upper

elementary age students with significant developmental delays.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem addressed in this practicum was that communication between parents and teachers of middle school age students needed to be improved. During the school year 1989-1990, when transferred from an elementary school housing grades 1 through 5 to the former middle school housing students in grades 7 and 8, the writer observed what appeared to be a sharp decline in parent-teacher communication.

Information gathered in this setting supported this observation. A formal needs assessment conducted by the assistant principal during the 1988-1989 school year identified parent-teacher communication as a problem for both parents and teachers of seventh and eighth grade students. One aspect of this needs assessment was reported in the Enterprise on June 7, 1990, which stated that "It was reported by 41.9 percent of the teachers responding to a questionnaire that they know about one-quarter of the parents of their students" (p. 23).

Although parent-teacher communication appeared somewhat better between parents and teachers of sixth grade students, a survey of these teachers conducted by

the writer in September, 1990, revealed that, on average, responding teachers actually talked with parents only twice during the course of the previous school year. If this situation were improved, parents and teachers would interact more frequently. Briefly stated, the problem was how to improve communication between parents and teachers of middle school age children.

Problem Documentation

Documentation of this problem came from information gathered in five separate schools. Information relative to communication between parents and teachers of seventh and eighth grade students was gathered in a series of surveys conducted in the junior high school in June, 1990. Information relative to communication between parents and teachers of sixth grade students was obtained by a survey of sixth grade teachers in all four elementary schools conducted in September, 1990 (see Appendix A). Respondents included 10 of the 11 teachers who taught at that level during the previous school year. Results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Survey of Grade 6 Teachers, September, 1990

Total number of students taught by teachers	239
Number of parents of these students these teachers spoke with	207
Average number of times teachers spoke with parents during the year	1.75
Average number of communications with parents by teachers	*

* Responses varied--most often by required progress reports and during required parent conferences.

A survey of 566 students (see Appendix B) conducted by all five of the seventh and eighth grade social studies teachers during the week of June 11, 1990, revealed that, according to their students, these teachers talked with an average of 38% of the parents of their students. Results of this survey are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Survey of Students Completed During the Week of 6/11/90

Number of students indicating that the teacher had talked with their parents	214
Number of students indicating that the teacher had not talked with their parents	352
Total	566

Most of this discussion took place during the three minutes allotted to each parent or guardian during the two parent-teacher conference evenings. Discussion by the writer with these teachers indicated that the teachers' personal records and observations supported the accuracy of the information reported by students.

A written survey (see Appendix C) of the parents of the writer's 127 seventh and eighth grade students in June, 1990, further verified the extent of the problem of poor communication, particularly since those parents who were most alienated were most likely to not complete the survey. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Survey of Parent-Teacher Communication

6/12/90 126 SENT OUT n = 68

Have			
1.	Talked with writer in person	Yes 33	(49%)
		No 35	
Have			
2.	Talked with writer by telephone	Yes 6	(9%)
		No 62	
3.	a. Estimate of total number of times talked with writer	30 responses to this item average 1.6 times per response	
	b. Estimate of total times talked with writer.	Average of 12.2 minutes per response	
4.	Satisfied with communication	Yes 37	(54%)
		No 21	
		Blank 10	
5.	Difficult or impossible to meet during school hours	Yes 47	(69%)
		No 20	
		Blank 1	

The following items were ranked on a 5-point scale from disagree to strongly agree.

It would be

6.	Helpful to meet with teachers in the early morning	2.91 (however, 31 agreed or agreed strongly)
7.	Helpful to be able to meet in the evenings one time per month	3.62
8.	Helpful to communicate by phone	3.63
9.	Present system satisfactory	3.1
10.	Important to be able to visit classroom	3.1

A survey of sixth grade teachers was conducted in September, 1990. Responses were obtained from 9 of 11 teachers who taught at that grade level last year to a total of 217 students. These teachers indicated that although they had spoken with 85% of the parents of their students during the last school year, they did so, on average, only twice during the entire school year, usually during the two scheduled parent-teacher conference evenings. Most other communication with parents, according to these teachers, was in the form of progress reports issued quarterly to all students and more frequently for students having academic or behavioral difficulties. Several teachers indicated that the most communication between parent and teacher centered around students with problems and that they were concerned that there was less communication with the parents of other children.

Causative Analysis

There are many factors which created problems in parent-teacher communication at the middle school level. Lack of time for communication was a problem for both parents and teachers. Many parents, due to demands of work and child care, were unable to meet with teachers during normal school hours. Teachers lacked time during the day to be able to meet with

parents. Large student loads, increasing social and emotional problems of students, "pullout programs," and numerous non-teaching duties made it difficult for teachers to adequately communicate with students during the day--not to mention talking with the parents. Teachers also lacked clerical staff to help support more frequent written and verbal communication with parents. Even if teachers made themselves available to parents with early morning and late afternoon appointment hours, it was still difficult if not impossible for parents to meet at those times. If parents and teachers were able to meet together during school hours, there were few, if any, comfortable and private places for them to talk to each other.

Most teachers did not want to, or were unable to, meet with parents during evening hours. There was little encouragement for teachers to do so, particularly because administrators and counselors did not hold evening meetings with parents either. Compensatory time or additional stipends for evening work with parents were not available to teachers in this setting. Furthermore, the age of the staff and the fact that so many teachers lived in other communities, often quite distant from the school, further discouraged evening meetings with parents.

Even telephone communication during the day was difficult for both parties. Many parents could not conveniently receive calls at their workplace from teachers. Teachers in this school found it difficult to encourage calls from parents. There was only one telephone in the building which was normally available to teachers, and this was located in the main office which was distant from most classroom locations and from the teacher workroom. Incoming callers frequently found the line to be busy, frustrating their attempts to reach school staff. This telephone also lacked quiet and privacy, which further discouraged its use by both parties.

Communication between parents and teachers was further hampered by the students themselves, who often did not want to share information about school with their parents or about home with their teachers. Messages carried by students were often lost or distorted. This often resulted in parents not knowing what was really going on in school and in teachers feeling that the parents were uncaring. This promoted a lack of trust and a feeling of discomfort on the part of some parents and teachers when dealing with each other.

Both parents and teachers often tacitly abetted students in their reticence to foster communication

between them by an attitude that suggested that young adolescents needed the freedom and independence which these students so loudly proclaimed without recognizing that they also needed the structure, encouragement, and support which could be promoted through effective parent-teacher communication and could result in improved academic and social competencies for the student.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Changes in the structure of the family make it both more difficult and more important for parents and teachers to communicate with each other. Single parent and blended families have increased in number. In 1986 23.5% of children under eighteen years of age lived in single-parent households (U. S. House of Representatives, 1988). In 1985 seven million children lived in stepfamilies; and with the likelihood of a continued high divorce rate, this trend should continue (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1990). The number of working mothers has also increased. By 1995 four out of five mothers of school-age children and two-thirds of the mothers of preschool children will be working (U. S. House of Representatives, 1988).

Moles (1982) observed that parents in these families are often stressed by work and family demands.

This stress may have often been reflected in the children (Elkind, 1981) making it even more important that communication takes place between parent and teacher. Yet, it was often difficult or impossible for many of these parents to communicate with teachers during the day. Leitch and Tangri (1988) reported that teachers themselves face these same family stresses which reduces their ability to communicate with parents. Seefeldt (1985) pointed out that teachers need to be sensitive to the demands placed upon parents in efforts to involve them in their children's education. Involving parents in ways which would reduce stress on them may not only benefit the scholastic attainment of students but may also benefit the parents. Both of these results help the teacher.

Lack of trust between parent and teacher may inhibit communication. Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) reported that there is often an unspoken and "unfounded mutual mistrust" (p.85) between the two parties, which results in negative outcomes for the student.

Cox (1983) pointed to the increasing "alienation of the public" (p. 208) as a cause of lack of support for the schools. He felt that locked doors symbolize the difficulty the public has in gaining access to the schools. This lack of access and resultant lack of information leads to negative speculation about the

schools and to a lack of support by the various publics, particularly minorities, served by the schools. Schools need to reach out to these alienated parents in order to gain their support and to promote positive learning outcomes for their children.

Hale-Benson (1986) pointed to the lack of knowledge about black culture and learning styles by many white teachers as a cause of problems for students and as a cause of poor communication with black parents. She felt that white models of behavior and cognition were inappropriately applied to black students and their parents by white teachers. This resulted in a lack of trust in and a lack of communication with the teacher by these parents. Lightfoot (1978) discussed the disastrous effects of institutional racism and classicism on communication between parents and teachers and the resultant mistrust, fear, defensiveness, and suspicion arising from this lack of communication.

Formal, structured hierarchical parent-teacher organizations designed at least in part to foster communication between parents and teachers may actually have discouraged participation of many parents of today's non-traditional families who have not felt welcome and who did not trust such organizations (Jackson & Cooper, 1989).

Cultural differences may have severely hampered communications and promoted mistrust between parents and teachers. Most American teachers are so imbued with Western thought processes and culturally determined verbal and non-verbal communications patterns that they may find it difficult to communicate effectively with those of a different cultural background even if the language used is English (Yacobacci-Tam, 1987).

Lack of understanding of the importance of parent involvement and parent-teacher communication, particularly for the young adolescent, by both parents and teachers may also contribute to poor communications between them. An editorial by Toepfer, Lounsbury, Arth and Johnston (1986) credited Donald Eichhorn with developing the term "transescence" (p.6) to describe the process of change that young people usually go through between the ages of 10 to 14 and the term "transescent" (p. 7) to denote the person in this transitional period. The authors endorsed the use of these terms because they helped to focus on the special characteristics of transescents and therefore promote a better understanding of the middle school which attempts to meet the widely varying needs of these students. This writer agrees that young people in this age group share common developmental tasks and were

most appropriately housed in a middle school setting as was the case in this practicum setting until last year as previously described. For this reason, and because the writer's work now involves sixth grade students, they were treated in this practicum as middle school transescents even though they were housed in an elementary school in this community.

Toepfer et al. (1986) went on to describe the fact that transescents often voiced their need to be able to make their own decisions about values and behavior, but the reality was that they wanted and needed adult understanding and guidance to support them during a difficult and confusing period. Although it may have appeared easier at times to ignore the transescents and let them make their own way, communication and cooperation between parents and teachers were essential to foster ultimal development in these young people.

Many teachers of transescent students in the community which was the setting of this practicum indicated that the parents of the most capable students were most often the ones to initiate contact with them. These teachers expressed concern over the difficulty in engaging the parents of the average and poorer students--those children who may have benefited most from increased parental involvement.

Lamm (1986) suggested that one reason that parents of average and lower level students may be less apt to involve themselves with teachers and the schools in the education of their children relates to American attitudes toward academic achievement. He said that many American parents believe that innate ability is a more important determinant of academic success than is the amount of effort put forth by the student. This belief could encourage apathy on the part of both parents and teachers. If they believe that the student is not of superior ability, then communication and cooperation to promote maximum effort from the student is of little consequence. Parents must become more involved in schools and in encouraging their children to work hard to learn at home, according to Lamm, if these children are to reach their full potential.

Involving parents in the education of their children may prove difficult, however. Many parents have little active involvement with their children in any activity. Banach (1990) considered "preoccupied parents" (p. 14) to be one of the greatest challenges facing educators today. He stated that working mothers and mothers who don't work outside of the home spend only an average of "less than 10 minutes per day playing with or reading to their [preschool] children" (p. 14). Fathers spend less time than this per week in

close personal activity with their children, Banach reported.

Elkind's 1981 book, The Hurried Child, describes some of the stresses on parents today which causes them to be so self-absorbed that they ignore the real needs of their children and satisfy their own unmet needs through them. Schools and society conspire to add to the burdens of these children, according to Elkind. During transescence, the stress on these youngsters may reveal itself through oppositional behavior toward their parents. Perhaps communication and cooperation between parents and teachers could help both of them to recognize the point of view of the youngster and work together effectively to reduce the stress causing the behavior.

Stress was also felt by teachers and administrators, and it impaired their ability to communicate with parents. Epstein and Becker (1982) reported that finding time to communicate with parents was a real issue for teachers who already struggle with so many other responsibilities. Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) shared the view that the workload of teachers discourages them from actively working with parents. Teachers must be convinced of the direct benefits of parent involvement if they are to invest the time necessary to work actively with parents. This

stress may be further reflected in the attitude of many teachers who blame the lack of home-school communication on parents (Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Moles, 1982) instead of looking to themselves to see what they can do to improve communications.

In addition to job stress, many teachers and administrators may not feel comfortable dealing with parents due to a lack of training and skill development and therefore avoid doing so, according to McAfee (1987).

Some schools and some teachers adopted a defensive posture and set themselves up as the experts in dealing with nearly all aspects of a student's life, including health care, counseling services, and food service, which actively discourage parental involvement in what they perceive to be the school's domain. Parents were encouraged not to interfere in the affairs of the school (Sandfort, 1987). With diminishing financial resources, it has become increasingly difficult for these schools to adequately provide these services without increased participation on the part of the very parents whose roles in the education of their children were previously purposefully curtailed, according to Sandfort. Even those teachers who did not consciously try to discourage parents from working with them may have been seen by parents as authority figures and

therefore unapproachable. Both circumstances inhibited communication and cooperation between parents and teachers.

Benefits of increased parental participation were widely supported in the research literature. Henderson (1987) in her widely cited annotated bibliography, The Evidence Continues to Grow Parent Involvement Improves Student Success, reported the following benefits:

> Higher grades and test scores
> Long-term academic achievement
> Positive attitude and behavior
> More successful programs
> More effective schools (p. 62)

None of the nearly 50 studies described by Henderson, however, dealt with transescent students per se.

Little research has been reported on the topic of parent-school communication (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985; Stafford, 1987). Some published findings suggest that the problem of poor parent-teacher communication is significant.

Epstein (1987), in a survey of parents of elementary school children, found that less than two out of three parents had had a conference with the teacher and that "almost two-thirds had never talked with the teacher by phone" (p. 124). A survey of teachers, parents, and students in the San Francisco Bay area by Dornbusch and Ritter (1986) suggested that

parent-teacher communication may be even worse at the high school level. What about those in-between-agers?

Weldman and LeMahieu (1985) reported that, despite the increased amounts of homework for students in grades 6 through 8, the lowest level of parental involvement in helping students with homework was reported by parents with students in these grades. Yet, these responding parents were motivated enough to participate in a workshop to help them to be able to assist their children in academic work at home. They also found a surprising lack of parent involvement in schoolwork with their children at the middle school level among the most highly educated parents. These parents, who held at least a baccalaureate degree, spent less time working with their children than did less educated parents.

Stevenson and Baker (1987), using a national sample, supported the finding of Weldman and LeMahieu of declining parental involvement in educational activities as their children grew older, particularly for boys. They reported, however, a positive correlation between the educational level of the mother and the amount of parental involvement--again, particularly for boys. They reported that parental involvement seems to be of particular benefit to girls. They also reported that, once the educational level of

the mother was considered, work outside the home did not bear a relationship to the amount of involvement by the parent.

In a survey of high school parents, Purnell and Gotts (1983) found that although over two-thirds of the parents attended extra-curricular activities, particularly athletic events, an even greater proportion did not attend parent meetings or parent advisory council meetings.

Thompson's 1981 study suggested that students entering the seventh grade displayed a sudden increase in "alienated behavior" (p. 8). This changed behavior was attributed to the structure of the secondary school which promoted a social climate inclined to discourage home-school relations. According to Thompson (1981), this division between home and school contributed to "deteriorating parent-child communication patterns" (p. 9), which promoted undesirable adolescent behaviors. The importance of mitigating against this split between the home and the school which occured at this time of transition was clearly implied by this research.

Pressures and demands on both teachers and parents, lack of understanding of the real educational and emotional needs of the transescent, lack of trust, barriers to communication, and the behavior of the

transescent student have all conspired to make parent-teacher communication for students in this age group particularly difficult. Although there was little research on parent teacher communication, the existing evidence suggested that improved communication between parents and teachers could have positive benefits for students, parents, and teachers.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The main goal of this practicum was to increase the communication among the teacher, the teacher's students, and the parents or guardians of these students. Another goal of this practicum was to empower parents to be more knowledgeable and aware of school and home learning activities so that they may have better supported their children in these learning activities.

Specific Objectives and Means of Measurement

The following objectives were projected for this practicum:

- Increasing interactive communication with parents to include 24 of the 26 parents of the teacher's students by the end of implementation as recorded by a written record of parent communications maintained by the writer and the teacher and by parent responses to a written survey (see Appendix D) completed by parents during the week of May 26, 1991. Of the 26 parents, 24 will indicate that they have had interactive communication with the teacher.

- Increasing the degree of parent satisfaction with the amount of communication between the teacher and themselves as indicated by responses to a written survey completed by parents during the week of May 26, 1991. Of the 26 parents, 24 will indicate that they are satisfied with the amount of these communications.

- Increasing the average parent reported length of time spent in two-way communication with the teacher to a minimum of 20 minutes by the end of implementation as reported by parents on a written survey completed during the week of May 26, 1991.

- Decreasing student alienation to learning as recorded by anecdotal records maintained by the teacher and the writer and by comparing the average daily classroom attendance for the teacher's current students during the implementation period to the average daily attendance for the teacher's students during the previous school year. Average daily attendance will increase by an average of one student on an equalized basis compared to the class of the previous year.

- Enabling parents and students to be able to conveniently access information during the implementation period by telephone about homework and class activities. By the end of the implementation period, 24 of the 26 parents and students (see

Appendix E) responding to written surveys will indicate that they were able to access this information.

- Increasing the involvement of parents in the teacher's classes to include the parents of at least three of the students. By the end of implementation, this number of parents will have participated directly in classroom activities as recorded by the teacher's and writer's logs of activities.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

During the implementation period of this practicum, the writer maintained a weekly log of activities carried out in conjunction with this practicum. Particular note was made of unanticipated outcomes of the intervention strategies.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Greene and Habana-Hafner (1988) saw improving home-school communication as an essential first step in increasing parental involvement with the school. Communication from the school can be essentially one way, requiring little, if any, response on the part of the parent. Traditional one-way communications about individual students include report cards, progress reports, and notes to the parent from the teacher. These methods often only require acknowledgment of receipt by the signature of the parent. These methods of communication, though essential, may be seen by some parents as "authoritarian" (Purnell & Gotts, 1983, p. 4).

Even less personal, but still essential, are printed communications from the school designed to convey information about groups of students, the school itself, or the entire school system. Typical of these methods are newsletters, memos to parents, press releases, handbooks, and health regulations. Methods of improving these one-way methods of communication were widely discussed in teacher-oriented and administrator-oriented publications. (See, for

example, Greene & Habana-Hafner, 1988; Grossnickle, 1981; Louisiana State Department of Education, 1988; McDaniel, 1982; Van Devender, 1988; Wherry, 1981).

Essentially, improvement of these printed communications involves increasing their visual appeal, clarity, and distribution methods in order to increase the likelihood that they will be read by parents. The use of computer-assisted correspondence to both personalize and to reduce the time spent in preparation of these communications is a promising method of improving them as reported by Minner, Prater, and Beane (1989).

Another method of improving one-way communication is through the use of recorded telephone messages which parents can conveniently access from their homes. The use of an answering machine also allows the parent to leave a message, which can be a step toward more interactive communication (Minner, Prater, & Beane, 1989; Szabo, 1990). Bittle (1975) and Minner and Prater (1987) have used such a method with parents of elementary school children and reported positive outcomes in student achievement. Jerold Bausch has developed a computer-assisted telephone recording system in use in a number of schools which allows parents to access messages about homework and classwork from teachers. Bausch reported that students'

achievement and attendance were improved and that parents were very satisfied in schools where the system is in use (Szabo, 1990).

Improving interactive two-way communication between teachers and parents was widely discussed in the literature. As Daresh (1986) has pointed out, effective communication must be "multidirectional" (p. 312). The most basic of these methods is the parent-teacher conference. Improvement of teachers' skills in conferencing is one method to improve this form of communication (Louisiana State Department of Education, 1988; McDaniel, 1982; Stephens & Wolf, 1980). Another reported method of improving these conferences is to provide more time for these conferences outside the normal school hours by scheduling them in the early morning, evenings, or on weekends (Greene & Habana-Hafner, 1988; Moles, 1982).

The Louisiana State Department of Education (1988) described another method of improving interactive communication by providing less formal environments for parent-teacher interaction through such activities as coffee klatsches, suppers, and other social activities which promote discussion.

More effective and creative use of the telephone is a method of increasing and improving two-way communication with parents. Davies (1987) has

suggested that "homework helper and homework hotline projects" (p. 148) help to promote better parent-teacher interaction and build parent involvement in the learning activities of their children. The use of telephone answering machines by individual teachers and by entire schools as previously mentioned may also promote greater interactive parent-teacher communication. Henniger (1987) stressed the importance of two-way communication with parents: Parents must give information as well as get information if the communication is to be truly meaningful.

Henniger (1981) also advocated the use of the telephone as the most efficient and least threatening method of interactive communication. Most adults are comfortable communicating by telephone. It is quick and convenient and does not require either party to travel in order to speak to each other. However, Henniger also pointed out that calls can be placed at inconvenient times for parents and that there is often a negative connotation to a call from a teacher. He suggested that this can be overcome by good telephone etiquette and by establishing a favorable attitude toward the calls by beginning a pattern of initially calling early in the school year with positive information.

Minner, Prater, and Beane (1989) suggested that improved two-way written communication between parents and teachers may be fostered by computer-assisted correspondence or by notebooks for messages between parents and teachers which are carried by students.

One prime goal of increased parent-teacher communication reported by several writers is to promote greater involvement in the learning activities of their children (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Henderson, 1987, 1988). This parental support and involvement is particularly important for the transescent (Thompson, 1981).

Byron (1987) suggested that school assignments, such as parent interviews by students, and other activities which focus on parent-student interaction could help to achieve this goal of active parent involvement in a way which is not seen as controlling by the student.

Contracts between the student, parents, and teacher are another means of communication which promotes the active involvement, support, and encouragement by parents in their children's learning (Anderson, 1987).

Another method described by Greene and Habana-Hafner (1988) is to use parents as teaching resources in the schools. Many parents have

specialized knowledge of places they have visited, countries of their ancestry, and career areas which they can share not only with their own children but with other children as well.

Parent education and discussion groups are sometimes used as a means of group parent-teacher communication which may be used to promote greater parental involvement in learning activities with their children (Mann, 1983). Seefeldt (1985) pointed out that these groups may actually unintentionally undermine the role of the parent who may legitimately have different values than the teacher. The writer believes that this may be particularly true of parent groups formed in multiethnic and multicultural communities such as the one which is the setting for this proposal.

Description of Selected Solution

The school employs some of the methods of improving parent-teacher communication previously discussed. A newsletter is published monthly, and a comprehensive student-parent handbook is issued to each student at the beginning of the year. Informal parent-teacher coffee klatsches are held before school several times during the year. The Parent-Teacher Organization meets monthly but actually actively

involves only a comparatively small number of parents. An annual town-wide parent-teacher dinner is held in the fall. An evening parent orientation session is held in October. Traditional parent-teacher conferences are held in November and in February with both afternoon and evening hours. Teachers are required by contract to participate in these sessions.

The writer did not believe that the staff was generally supportive of increased communication with parents, based on conversations with staff and the lack of teacher attendance at parent-teacher functions unless required by contract. In fact, only one teacher indicated willingness to participate in the proposed establishment of a homework hotline for seventh and eighth grade students which teachers could have operated from their own homes in the evening for additional compensation of $20.50 per hour. Due to lack of staff support, the proposal was abandoned.

Because of this lack of support, this proposal was originally planned for implementation in the writer's own classroom with implementation to begin just prior to the opening of school for the 1990-1991 school year. A separate telephone line and answering machine were installed in the writer's home for this purpose. Just before school opened, the writer was appointed to a counseling position which made this strategy untenable.

The writer sought teachers of transescent students who would be willing to work with the writer in order to implement this proposal. Fortunately, a veteran sixth grade teacher with whom the writer had previously worked and who was interested in improving parent-teacher communication volunteered. Strategies to be implemented to improve communication among the teacher, the parents, and his students were negotiated between the writer and the teacher. A discussion of these strategies follows.

The teacher was to send to the parent or guardian of each student a report of student progress at the mid-point of each term. This report was an attempt to promote positive communications between the writer and parents. The teacher was also to send a note of a positive nature to the parent or guardian of at least one student in the class each week with the goal of sending home at least one positive statement for each student in the class by the end of the school year.

The writer established a telephone line at home which the teacher's students and their parents would be able to call for recorded messages regarding homework and classwork on Sunday through Thursday evenings between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. The writer would record these messages onto this machine from written or telephone messages from the teacher. Parents and

students could use this line to leave a recorded message for the teacher, which the writer would transmit to the teacher. Parent calls would be returned within 24 hours whenever possible (see Appendix F).

The teacher was to solicit information from parents regarding the most convenient times and places to contact them by telephone (see Appendix G). The teacher was to use this information to attempt to call all the parents once by the end of the first marking term. The teacher or his designee would attempt to call the parents of students who were absent for more than three consecutive days in order to offer support and to encourage as prompt a return to school as possible.

The teacher was to be available to parents on a drop-in basis one morning per week prior to normal school hours from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and other mornings by appointment on an as-needed basis.

In early November the teacher was to solicit parent volunteers to make presentations to students on topics related to the curriculum (see Appendix H).

The writer, in conjunction with the teacher, was to maintain a file of information regarding the communications with parents for each student as well as

anecdotal notes recorded weekly in a log in order to document unexpected events.

These methods were selected because they promoted the teacher's ability to communicate with a large number of people in a most efficient manner. The teacher was enabled to provide additional service to parents and students with a minimum additional outlay of time and energy. These strategies responded to the expressed needs of parents for communicating at times outside of the normal school day according to the results of the survey of parents taken during the week of June 12, 1990, and their expressed willingness to communicate by telephone equipped with an answering machine. The information reported by Bittle (1975), Henniger (1981), Minner and Prater (1987), Minner, Prater, and Beane (1989) and Szabo (1990) encouraged the writer in the use of telephone communications with parents as a means to foster positive learning and behavioral outcomes for students. It was hoped that by providing support for parents and students when and where they needed it the most--in their homes during after-school hours--that the parents, the students, and the teacher would all benefit.

The calendar plan follows on the next two pages.

CALENDAR PLAN

DATE	TASK	ACTIVITY	PERSONS INVOLVED	RECORDING/EVALUATION METHODS
Week of 8/20/90	install extra telephone line and answering machine in home	purchase telephone and answering machine; get installation appointment	writer, installer	test equipment
Week of 9/4/90	begin search for teacher volunteer for program	distribute flyer in schools seeking volunteers; talk about program with staff	writer, teachers, principals	writer's notes, staff response
Week of 9/17/90	begin gathering additional data on parent-teacher communication	obtain permission to survey staff, develop and distribute survey	writer, teachers, principals	survey results
10/10/90	announce program to parents and students	visit class, evening with parents, distribute announcement, press release if approved	writer, teacher, parents, students principal, director	teacher record of communication, parent and student evaluation, writer's log
ongoing	prepare tape for answering machine	transfer message from teacher to answering machine; monitor machine	teacher, writer	teacher record of communication, parent and student evaluation, writer's log
ongoing: Thursday mornings	be available for parent walk-in visits	meet with parents	teacher	teacher record of communication, parent and student evaluation, writer's log
weekly	writer meets with teacher	maintain log; feedback; troubleshoot	teacher, writer	writer's log
weekly	send positive notes to parent	prepare notes	teacher	teacher record of communication, parent and student evaluation

DATE	TASK	ACTIVITY	PERSONS INVOLVED	RECORDING/EVALUATION METHODS
10/10/90 to 12/10/90	initial call to parents of each student	brief informative call, feedback from parents	teacher	teacher record of communications, log, parent evaluations
weeks of 11/ 5/90 1/28/91 5/ 6/91	write mid-term progress reports to parents of all students	distribute to parents through students	teacher, students parents	teacher record of communications, log, parent evaluations
week of 11/4/90	distribute letter for parent volunteers	interview parents schedule presentations	teacher, parents, students	teacher record of communications, log, parent evaluations
evenings: October November February	parent-teacher conferences	discussion with parents	teacher, parents	teacher record of communications, log, parent evaluations
week of 2/4/91	write mid-term practicum report	analyze progress to date	writer, teacher, adviser	adviser's evaluation
week of 6/2/91	submit practicum report	complete report	writer, adviser	adviser's evaluation

Report of Action Taken

The writer established a telephone line in his home which parents and students were able to access for a message describing homework, classwork, or other activities recorded by the writer from information provided by the classroom teacher. Students and parents were able to access this information from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Sunday through Thursday evenings during the implementation period beginning October 10, 1991, and continuing through the end of the school year. In actual practice, the line was in operation 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with the message for the day usually recorded by 5:00 p.m.

It was originally the writer's intention to have the outgoing message for parents and students remotely recorded by the teacher on the answering machine so that callers would hear the message in the teacher's own voice. Tests with the telephone answering equipment available to the writer forced this idea to be abandoned due to several difficulties. Any keying error by the teacher in gaining access to the outgoing message feature of the machine required that the sequence be started over. This was both troublesome and time-consuming. When calling from school, access to an outside line could be lost in the interim. Even

if the caller were able to call back immediately, the entire procedure, including listening to the previous message, had to be initiated again. Another problem with this equipment was that the recording time for outgoing messages was limited, which could cause a message to be cut off before it was completed.

In order to ease the workload on the teacher and to ensure the completeness of the information to be transmitted to parents and students, the teacher called the answering machine and followed the much simpler and more reliable procedure of leaving an incoming message which the writer transcribed and recorded as an outgoing message for parents and students. On days when the writer worked in the practicum setting, the information was obtained directly from the teacher, eliminating the need for a call.

During the period of implementation there were only six times when the teacher did not provide information for a particular day, due either to absence or forgetfulness. On these occasions the writer recorded a message that no information was received for that day, augmented this with information that was available, apologized for any inconvenience that may have been caused by the temporary lapse in service, and urged them to call the next day when full service would be restored.

The writer and teacher jointly announced the establishment of the Pupil/Parent Assistance line to students on October 10, 1990. At the same time, a letter was sent home to parents explaining the service (see Appendix F). After soliciting information from parents as to the most convenient time to call and the availability of the teacher for walk-in conferences on Thursday mornings before school with no appointment necessary (see Appendix G), the teacher held a telephone conference with the parents of each child in an effort to establish positive communication early in the school year. The teacher reminded parents during these calls that the telephone system allowed them to access information on homework and classwork and also to leave a message for the teacher if it was inconvenient for the parents to call the school.

In early November the teacher solicited parent volunteers to share specialized knowledge with the class (see Appendix H). Although no parents volunteered to share work or travel experiences, three parents volunteered as computer aides to assist students in word processing and other uses of the computer. These parents underwent training by the teacher and worked in the classroom with students three days per week for one hour using the three computers in the classroom. The teacher was very pleased by their

efforts. Fifteen parents accompanied the teacher and students to an evening professional baseball game. Nine parents of students from this class also volunteered to assist students with writing, rehearsing and presenting the end of the year program for sixth grade students. This program is presented entirely by students and parents.

The teacher sent a report of student progress to the parent of each student at the midpoint of each term. Reports were sent to students making satisfactory progress as well as those who were not in an effort to promote more positive communications with parents. The teacher was to have sent a note of a positive nature to the parent of one student each week to further augment positive communication. The teacher did not attain this goal, citing time and other pressures as hindering this effort.

These activities were carried out in addition to the normal parent-teacher conferences held in November and February during which times the parents of each student were invited to meet with the teacher.

The writer met with the teacher at least one time per week to discuss progress with the implementation. The writer maintained a weekly log of activities carried on in conjunction with this practicum.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Results of this practicum encouraged the writer in the use of the telephone as a means to increase communication among the teacher, the teacher's students and the parents or guardians of these students. Results also suggest that parents were empowered to be more knowledgeable and aware of school and home learning activities so that they could better support their children in these learning activities.

All 26 parents responding to a survey during the week of May 20, 1991 (see Appendix D) summarized in Table 4 indicated that they had had interactive communication with the teacher. All of the parents also indicated that they were able to easily access information from the teacher regarding homework and classwork. Of the 26 parents, 25 indicated that they were satisfied with the amount of communication between themselves and the teacher. Despite this degree of satisfaction, 16 of the parent respondents indicated that they had talked with the teacher a total of less than 20 minutes during the school year, indicating that the goal of having parents report that they had spent an average of at least 20 minutes in interactive

communication with the teacher was not met despite the efforts of the teacher.

Table 4

Summary of Parent Evaluation

					YES	NO
1.	Talked with teacher during year				26	0
2.	# times talked to teacher	1-2	3-5	6-10	11+	
	# responses	13	9	4	0	
3.	Time spent in discussion (in minutes)	1-10	11-19	20-29	30+	
	# responses	6	10	8	2	
					YES	NO
4.	Information was easy to access				26	0
5.	Satisfied with amount of communication				25	1
6.	Parent used telephone system				12	14
7.	Parent found system to be helpful				24	2
8.	Parent thought system to be helpful (to students)				26	0
9.	Recommend continued use of system				25	1

Teacher records and attendance figures suggest that students became less alienated from learning during the implementation period. In comparison to previous classes, the teacher found this particular group of students to be harder to motivate and more difficult to keep disciplined. Despite this

impression, the teacher did find that fewer students missed homework assignments as the school year progressed. The teacher attributed this improvement, at least to some degree, to the availability by telephone of homework information for students and parents. The teacher also noted that two students, who early in the year seemed to need much reassurance, particularly about their homework, made fewer demands for attention regarding assignments as implementation progressed. These two students did, however, call the Pupil/Parent Assistance Line very regularly. Perhaps the recorded information was able in part to replace direct attention from the teacher.

The goal of improving average daily attendance by one student per day was attained. Compared to the class of the previous year, average daily attendance showed improvement. Both classes had 26 students. The class of the previous year had an average daily attendance of 23.66 students. The current class had an average daily attendance of 24.82 students for the 142 days approximating the implementation period for which attendance data was available. The small size of the student sample made this improvement subject to chance factors as well as the practicum strategies and, although encouraging, should be viewed with caution.

Student responses to a survey on May 20, 1991 (see Apppendix E) are summarized in Table 5. These responses indicate that 24 of 26 students did use the message machine for homework help during the implementation period. Some used this system only a few times, some used it very frequently; yet all the students responded that it was helpful to be able to call and that this system should be continued. Twelve students thought that they learned more because they were able to call the answering machine. Eight students felt that they were more apt to do their homework because their parents were able to call and check on their homework.

Table 5

Summary of Student Evaluation

					YES	NO
1.	Used message machine				24	2
2.	Number of times called	0	1-2	3-5	6-10	11+
	# of responses	2	3	11	4	6
					YES	NO
3.	Found to be helpful				26	0
4.	Recommend continued use				26	0
5.	Homework completion due to parents' checking				8	18
6.	Believe parents called message machine				6	20
7.	Helped increase learning				12	14

Students apparently took this service seriously. During eight months of operation, there were no prank messages left by students. One student who called every night simply said, "Thank you." Even though only 6 students indicated that their parents used the message machine to check on their homework, 12 parents indicated that they had used the telephone system. No parents used the system to leave a message for the teacher. Despite the relatively small number of parents who actually used the telephone answering system, 24 of the 26 parents said that they found it to be helpful to them to make them more aware of their son's or daughter's schoolwork. Perhaps the parents had their children call instead of calling themselves.

No parent came for a drop-in conference with the teacher on the before-school Thursday morning time, even though parents were informed of the availability of the teacher at this time, both in writing and verbally. Perhaps this time (8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.) conflicted with work or family responsibilities, or perhaps parents were satisfied with other times and means to communicate with the teacher so that this opportunity was not needed.

The goal of having at least three parent volunteers was met through the three parents who served

as computer assistants in the classroom three days per week as previously described.

Conclusion

Although both students and parents indicated that they were pleased with the telephone information system and with the communication between them and the teacher, the writer had hoped for higher levels of parent participation in meetings with the teacher and in use of the telephone information system.

Although 16 parents did not indicate that they had spent over 20 minutes talking with the teacher, the writer cannot fault the initiatives of the teacher to provide parents with opportunities for greater communication. According to teacher records, each parent was contacted early in the year by telephone for an introductory phone call. Each parent was invited to the school for at least two evening parent conferences. The teacher also participated in eight schoolwide evening parent-teacher organization meetings and three evening meetings specifically for parents of sixth grade students. All of these meetings were publicized by student-carried announcements, inclusion in the school calendar, and on the telephone information service. Except for the parent conference evenings, which teacher records show that each parent was seen

face-to-face at least once, attendance by parents of students in this class at these other evening meetings--even those specifically for parents of sixth grade students--was relatively poor. Even though the teacher was available for unscheduled conferences at least one day per week before school, no parents utilized this time. It is interesting to note that 15 parents did attend the evening professional baseball game, however.

The writer has no explanation for the relatively low parent reported time spent in communication with the teacher other than parental preoccupation as described by Banach (1990) and stress as detailed by Elkind (1981). Perhaps this stress and preoccupation has been especially severe due to the sharp economic recession in this geographic area at this time.

More parents may have used the telephone information system if they were better informed about their role in using this system to help them to help their children. In retrospect, the content of the messages could have been more specific in information on ways that parents could assist their children in their work in order to encourage greater parental use of the telephone information system.

Despite these shortcomings, the writer believes that the results support the more widespread use of the

telephone message system as a means to support and encourage both students and parents. All of the students and all but one of the parents felt that this system should be continued. All of the parents and all of the students felt that this system was useful to students. Several students commented that even though they did not use the telephone service often, when they did, it was very useful and helpful to them. The writer agrees with the anonymous comments of another student reagarding the telephone information system which follow: "I think it's great and It [sic] should be a Parent/Pupil [Assistance Line] in every town in the United States."

Recommendations

An initial meeting early in the school year with parents to explain the importance of their role in encouraging the successful learning of their children might encourage greater participation in the classroom and in the use of the telephone information system.

The telephone information service would be more valuable to parents if the messages were recorded directly by the teacher with emphasis on the ways parents can assist in their children's learning.

In order to maximize usage, there should be no time limitations on access to the recorded messages;

they should be available 24 hours per day. This can be accomplished at no additional inconvenience to the person installing such a system if the machine can be set for silent operation with no audible ringing.

Dissemination

An abstract describing this program was distributed to the nearly 300 professional staff members in the school system where this practicum took place. A seminar for teachers interested in developing their own parent/pupil assistance lines will be held in September, 1991.

An article describing this practicum and the modification of the answering machine aspects of this program to the needs of school counselors has been submitted for publication in the Counselor's Notebook, the Journal of the Massachusetts School Counselors Association.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER SURVEY PARENT COMMUNICATION

June 12, 1990

Dear Parents or Guardians

One of the things which teachers often do at the end of the academic year is to review events of the past year with a view toward improving professional practice for the upcoming year. I am asking for your input to help me plan parent activities for the next school year and to help me to establish a baseline by which to measure the success of my efforts.

Would you please help by answering the questions which follow this introduction? Your responses in no way influence your child's grade, and this information is not a part of your child's school records. In fact, you need not sign this form unless you choose to do so. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

1. Have you talked with me in person this year regarding your child?

   Yes No (Circle one)

2. Have you talked to me by telephone regarding your child?

   Yes No (Circle one)

3. Please estimate the total number of times we have talked together about your child: _____ times, totaling _____ minutes.

   (Indicate numbers)

4. Are you satisfied with the amount of communication between us?

   Yes No (Circle one)

5. Do you find it difficult or impossible to meet with teachers during normal school hours? Yes No (Circle one)

The following questions are designed to see how I may best help parents to be able to talk with me. Please circle the number that best describes your agreement with the statement:

1 means disagree; 2 means somewhat disagree; 3 means agree somewhat; 4 means agree; 5 means strongly agree.

6. It would be helpful to meet with teachers before normal school hours by appointment from 7:15 a.m. until 8:00 a.m.

1 2 3 4 5

7. It would be helpful to be able to meet with a teacher in the evening by appointment between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. once per month.

1 2 3 4 5

8. It would be helpful to be able to call a teacher in the evening to speak about my child, even if it meant leaving a message on an answering machine to be returned later.

1 2 3 4 5

9. The present system of communicating with teachers is satisfactory

1 2 3 4 5

10. It is important to me to be able to visit my child's classroom to observe the class by prior arrangement with the teacher.

1 2 3 4 5

I welcome your comments; please feel free to share any ideas with me.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF STUDENTS COMPLETED DURING
THE WEEK OF 6/11/90

SURVEY OF STUDENTS COMPLETED DURING
THE WEEK OF 6/11/90

Question asked by teacher:

"Have your parents talked with me during this year either in person or on the telephone?"

	Yes	No	Total
Writer	42	84	126
Teacher A	37	74	111
Teacher B	41	69	110
Teacher C	38	64	102
Teacher D	56	61	117
Total	214	352	566
Percentage	38%	62%	100%

APPENDIX C

SURVEY OF PARENTS
JUNE, 1990

June 12, 1990

Dear Parents or Guardians

One of the things which teachers often do at the end of the academic year is to review events of the past year with a view toward improving professional practice for the upcoming year. I am asking for your input to help me plan parent activities for the next school year and to help me to establish a baseline by which to measure the success of my efforts.

Would you please help by answering the questions which follow this introduction? Your responses in no way influence your child's grade, and this information is not a part of your child's school records. In fact, you need not sign this form unless you choose to do so. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

1. Have you talked with me in person this year regarding your child?

   Yes No (Circle one)

2. Have you talked to me by telephone regarding your child?

   Yes No (Circle one)

3. Please estimate the total number of times we have talked together about your child: _____ times, totaling _____ minutes.

   (Indicate numbers)

4. Are you satisfied with the amount of communication between us?

   Yes No (Circle one)

5. Do you find it difficult or impossible to meet with teachers during normal school hours? Yes No (Circle one)

Page 2

The following questions are designed to see how I may best help parents to be able to talk with me. Please circle the number that best describes your agreement with the statement:

1 means disagree; 2 means somewhat disagree; 3 means agree somewhat; 4 means agree; 5 means strongly agree.

6. It would be helpful to meet with teachers before normal school hours by appointment from 7:15 a.m. until 8:00 a.m.

1 2 3 4 5

7. It would be helpful to be able to meet with a teacher in the evening by appointment between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. once per month.

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8. It would be helpful to be able to call a teacher in the evening to speak about my child, even if it meant leaving a message on an answering machine to be returned later.

1 2 3 4 5

9. The present system of communicating with teachers is satisfactory

1 2 3 4 5

10. It is important to me to be able to visit my child's classroom to observe the class by prior arrangement with the teacher.

1 2 3 4 5

I welcome your comments; please feel free to share any ideas with me.

APPENDIX D

SURVEY OF PARENTS
MAY 20, 1991

May 20, 1991

Dear Parents or Guardians

It has been one of my goals this year to communicate more effectively with you. It is time now to see how well I have met this goal. Would you please help me by spending a few minutes to complete the evaluation below? This information is for my personal use and will not become a part of school records nor will it influence your son's or daughter's grade for this course. Thank you in advance for your help.

PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE OF YOUR CHOICE

1. Have you talked with me during this school year regarding your son or daughter?

   YES NO

2. Please estimate the total number of times that we have talked together.

   A. 1-2 B. 3-5 C. 6-10 D. 11 or more

3. Please estimate the total length of time that we have talked together.

   A. 1-10 min. B. 11-19 min. C. 20-29 min. D. 30+ min.

4. Do you feel that you were able to get information easily from this teacher about your son's or daughter's homework and classwork?

   YES NO

5. Are you satisfied with the amount of communication between us?

   YES NO

6. Did you use the home telephone system to communicate with me?

   YES NO

7. Did you find this telephone system to be helpful to you as a parent to be more aware of your son's or daughter's schoolwork?

   YES NO

8. Do you think that this telephone system was helpful to your son or daughter?

   YES NO

9. Should the use of the the answering machine and phone system for parent and student use be continued?

   YES NO

Your comments on the back of this sheet are welcome.

APPENDIX E

SURVEY OF STUDENTS
MAY 20, 1991

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS PAPER

STUDENT EVALUATION MAY 20, 1991

Dear Student,

One of my goals this year has been to communicate better with you and with your parents. The questions below are to help me to know if you found these efforts to be helpful to you. Thank you for your help by completing this form. The information is for my personal use and will not affect your grade or be part of your school records.

PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE OF YOUR CHOICE

1. Did you call the message machine for homework help during this school year?

   YES NO

2. How many times did you call the message machine?

   A. 0 B. 1-2 C. 3-5 D. 6-10 E. 11 or more

3. Did you find it helpful to be able to call about homework?

   YES NO

4. Do you think that I should continue to use the answering machine and phone system for parent and student use that began this year?

   YES NO

5. Did the fact that your parents could check on your homework make you more apt to do the homework in my class?

   YES NO

6. Did your parents call the message machine to check about your homework to your knowledge?

   YES NO

7. Do you think that you learned more because you were able to call the answering machine?

   YES NO

Please feel free to write below what you think about being able to call the assistance line. You may use the back of the paper if you need more room. Thanks for your help.

APPENDIX F

ANNOUNCEMENT OF PARENT/PUPIL ASSISTANCE LINE

October 10, 1990

Dear Parent or Guardian:

One of my goals as a teacher this year is to improve my communication with you. Many studies have shown that parent-teacher communication and parental support of the learning activities of their children lead to positive learning and behavioral outcomes for students. You may reach me by telephone at school or leave a message with the school secretary if I am in class by dialing 961-6244. I will make every effort to return your calls promptly. A note from you carried by your son or daughter is also often a convenient way for you to make an appointment or to share information. You may also meet with me in person either before after school at a mutually convenient time by appointment. I am available to see you on a drop-in basis with no appointment needed on Thursday morning from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Since good communication is a two-way process, would you please complete the enclosed form so that I may call you at a more convenient time and place? Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. I look forward to talking with you.

Very truly yours,

Attachment

APPENDIX G

PARENT TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

PARENT TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

Grade____ Class Period_____

Name of Student_____

Street Address_____
Randolph, MA 02368

Name of Parent(s), Guardian(s), or Custodial Adult(s):

#1 _____

Telephone #: ( )_____

Best times to call:_____

#2 _____

Telephone #: ( )_____

Best times to call:_____

APPENDIX H

PARENT VOLUNTEER SOLICITATION

November 4, 1990

Dear Parents or Guardians,

By now I hope to have talked with you and provided you with an opportunity to talk with me. Your son or daughter should be reasonably settled into the school year and you should have an idea of the content of the curriculum.

Since the older I get, the more I know that my knowledge is limited, I am looking to you to share your special knowledge with my students and me. Many of you are experts on different parts of our country where you have lived or worked. Some of you have experience in foreign countries. Some of you have knowledge of different cultures. Some of you may have expert knowledge of government or politics or various professions which would benefit my students.

Would you please spend a minute to complete the enclosed form if you think that you would be willing to volunteer to share your knowledge with the class? I will add your name to my list of resource persons and will contact you to discuss this further if it appears possible for you to present to the class. If you do share your knowledge with the class, I will help you in whatever way possible to make the experience a pleasant and meaningful one for you and a positive learning experience for my students. I can assure you that you will not find the students to be boring!

Very truly yours,

Attachment

PARENT RESOURCE PERSON INFORMATION SHEET

NAME_____

What area of knowledge do you wish to share with my students? (Travel, career, cultural, hobby, etc.) Please describe this briefly below.

Do you have materials to share with students? (Slides, tools, models, artifacts, etc.) If so, could you describe them briefly?

When might you be available to visit our class?

How can I best reach you to discuss this further?

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request. By working together we can improve the knowledge of the children we both consider to be so important.